

Top of Mind

Perspectives and Commentary

Brand Expansion and the Art of War

IN THE *Art of War*, the classic ancient Chinese text on the philosophy of combat, a seventh century knight named Du Mu is quoted as saying, "If they are alert on their eastern flank, strike on their western flank."

I doubt that Du Mu went on to business school after his tour ended. But damn if he didn't lay out a plan for overcoming a bigger brand if you're third, fourth or even eighth in the category.

Why attack the bigger brand where it is strongest? Better to out-flank it on a different battlefield.

If you're a candy brand, for example, don't fight Hershey in the candy aisle alone. Take your brand to whole new categories.

To test whether Mu's maxim was indeed applicable to the candy business, our company, Whole-Brain Brand Expansion, interviewed kids aged 12-16 to evaluate their impressions of "novelty" candies and smaller brands—the trademarks that do battle daily with Hershey, Mars and Nestlé.

The warriors included: Mike and Ike,

By Alan Sharavsky



What marketers at Bazooka Joe and Junior Mints can learn from Chinese philosophy.

Charms Blow Pops, Jujyfruits, Tic Tac, Bazooka, Hot Tamales and Junior Mints.

Our goal was to see if they could compete with an 800-pound gorilla on their terms, not on the gorilla's. Would this fickle audience permit these brands to appear in other aisles and categories? How far would they allow a small brand to stretch?

We recruited 157 kids from a national database of six million, and asked

them to complete an Internet survey about the candy brands they ate and how "cool" they thought they were.

Then we provided a list of 18 treats and sweets, and asked respondents to select six they would like to see their favorite brands expand into. Their choices ranged from breakfast bars and toaster pastries to breath strips and marshmallows.

The results? Our 157 consumers told us—shouted at us—that midsized brands have places to go far outside their current categories. For example, Bazooka has equity that stretches way beyond gum. Of the kids we surveyed, 60% said they would be interested in Bazooka gummi candies; 46% said they'd purchase Bazooka fruit rollups.

That's great news if you're parent company Topps, but no shocker given their "chewing" heritage.

More surprising was the 35% who said they'd try Bazooka ice cream. As any researcher will tell you, a number above 25% is significant, and could represent a new business for many brands.

While we're talking about ice cream,

28% of those surveyed said they'd consider Bazooka ice cream topping. And 31% reported they would try Bazooka mints.

Speaking of mints and ice cream, a whopping 60% were gaga for Junior Mints ice cream snacks, while 46% said they'd try Junior Mints ice cream toppings.

Too easy because everyone likes ice cream? Well, 51% would like to have some Junior Mints cookies with that ice cream.

Actually, we learned that every brand in the study had juice beyond its mainstay products. About 59% said they fancied Mike and Ike fruit rollups. Tic Tac could launch a breath strip tomorrow, with 62% taking it at the checkout. And 44% would grab a Hot Tamales breath strip. Even Jujyfruit, the brand with the least awareness, attracted 57% for hard candies.

Of course, there's always a suspicion that kids will say "yes" to anything involving candy. So as a reality check, we included a few off-the-wall concepts to make sure our consumers were answering honestly and taking the survey seriously. (They are, after all, teenagers.)

Tic Tacs pancake syrup? Not so much, at 3%. Ditto Bazooka toaster pastries, at 14%, Jujyfruit snack bars at 12%, or Mike and Ike breakfast bars at 9%.

Without the responsibility of running these businesses, it's easy to be a Monday morning brand director, offering brainstorming and spending other people's money. Any of the above product concepts might stumble in development and testing. Yet, the numbers tell a compelling story. Altoids certainly figured it out with Altoid Breath Strips.

Every day we see national brands that have untapped cachet that could carry them into new categories, creating new usages and produce organic growth.

Put another way, we return to seventh century brand director Du Mu, who wrote: "Militarists avoid the full and strike the empty, so they first have to recognize emptiness and fullness in others and themselves."

In other words, recognize where your brand equity is full, and take it to where your competitor's equity is empty on the shelf. Then strike.

Alan Sharavsky is the right-brain partner in Whole-Brain Brand Expansion, a brand and new-product consultancy based in Plymouth Meeting, Pa. Contact: (610) 834-7785 or alan@wbbe.biz.

RANDOM THOUGHTS By Dan Rosandich

